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REVIEWS

THE NORTH ITALIAN PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE

THE NORTH ITALIAN PAINTERS OF THE RENAISSANCE. By Bernard Berenson. New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons.

This is the completion of one of the most important achievements in art criticism — perhaps the most important since the publication of Crowe and Cavalcasselle's monumental work. It is probable that Mr. Berenson knows more about Italian painting than any living man, and in these four slender volumes, covering the Venetian, the Florentine, the Central and the North Italian schools, he has undertaken to compress the substance of all his knowledge. They are marvelous books, containing in a narrow compass the fruits of a life of labor, of labor so intense that at one time it threatened to shatter the author's health forever. No one interested in Italian art can afford to ignore these volumes. In fact, owing to their extreme condensation, their full import cannot be realized at a single reading, and the student of Italian painting should return to them again and again.

Their brevity has its advantage not merely for the reader, but for Mr. Berenson himself. They are too short to permit him to exhibit his chief fault as an art-critic, an overweening confidence in his own opinions. His judgment as to the authorship of Italian pictures is probably worth more than that of any man who has ever lived; but in his critical articles it is pronounced with an assurance that is amazing and at times exasperating. Where all that a more modest critic will venture to say is that a certain picture is the work of a given school, all of whose members paint much alike, Mr. Berenson will unhesitatingly assign it to a particular artist and most likely to a particular decade of his life. He may be right in these bold attributions. Documents since discovered have justified some of them, and so far as I know, none have been thoroughly discredited; but to any ordinary person he often seems to state as unquestionable facts views which should be advanced as mere conjectures. This fault, if fault it be, is apparent in these volumes only in the lists of pic-

tures in the appendix. You will look there in vain for many a work generally assigned to a favorite master; and you will find attributed to him some pictures that you had never suspected to be his. Still the lists are probably the best to be had anywhere, and they are certainly most convenient.

It seems to me that Mr. Berenson does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of color. His three essential elements in painting are "tactile values," by which he means a realistic presentation that makes us feel that we could handle the figures; "space-composition," or the relation of the figures to one another in space, so that they may not, like those of the Egyptians, all seem to be on one plane; and movement, in which he includes the evident power to move in figures that are at rest. These qualities imply mastery of drawing and of light and shade; but beauty and appropriateness of color seem to me equally essential. Indeed, in the conclusion of this volume, Mr. Berenson confesses that he has sinned in ignoring color, and expresses the hope that he may live to rewrite his work on the Venetians, so as to give to color a more prominent place.

This volume is the least important and the least interesting of the four; for, somewhat unwisely, as it seems to me, Mr. Berenson treated the man who dominated the painting of Northern Italy and formed its principal school, Leonardo da Vinci, in the one on Florence. This leaves no artists of the greatest rank save Mantegna and Correggio, so that the book is mostly concerned with men of the second or lower grade.

In one respect he seems to me grievously at fault, and that is in the slight esteem in which he holds Francesco Francia. This is perhaps due to his historical bias. Francia was not the originator of any movement nor the founder of any school, whose influence can be traced through a multitude of pupils; and so he has less merit in Mr. Berenson's eyes than the hard and unpleasant Tura. Yet, he is one of the most satisfying of all artists. Sweetness and beauty and serenity are his in richest measure. His works are a joy forever. They are among the things with which one loves to live, on which one would delight to fix his glazing eye. They have the merits of Perugino and Raphael, though of course they do not reach the impeccable artistry of

the Prince of Painters. Mr. Berenson admits the charm of the "Madonna of the Rose Hedge," at Munich; but he has no word of praise for the "Pieta," of the National Gallery, that supremely touching and beautiful work; nor for the "Annunciation," of the Brera, with its uplifting sense of space and its quiet dignity; nor for the "Descent from the Cross," at Parma, whose far-reaching landscape is one of the most delightful things in Renaissance art. In fact, it seems to me, as it seems to most lovers of painting, that Francia holds a place second only to the greatest; and the low opinion which Mr. Berenson expresses of his achievement must raise a protest in many bosoms.

He is equally unjust to the immediate followers of Leonardo, to Luini, Il Sodoma, Solario, Gaudenzio Ferrari and Boltraffio, though he concedes a certain merit to Gaudenzio, because his rugged genius failed to assimilate entirely the teachings of the master.

Yet this school of Leonardo's is one of the most delightful things in all the range of art. It is true that they did not sound the depths nor climb the heights that Leonardo reached. No one could doubt that. But they give us in a high degree one element of his genius, the sweetness of his female faces.

Luini's types may, as Mr. Berenson says, lack variety. The same exquisite smile may play around too many lips. His countenances may present too uniformly the same lovely oval. But those beautiful faces, faultless in their contours and irradiated by that smile that approaches closer than any other to the fathomless smile of Leonardo, are possessions of purest joy.

It is true that Il Sodoma painted some works that are feeble — what artist has not? — but his "St. Sebastian" is the most beautiful youth that modern art has given us, lacking something of the wholesome vigor of the Greek ideal, but so exquisite in his slender proportions and in the refinement of his countenance that he makes an irresistible appeal to every beholder. The "Ecstasy" and the "Swooning" of St. Catherine, at Siena, are also among the most exquisite creations of the brush, delightful in their soft color and unsurpassable in their delicacy. And

what is there more touching than his "Christ Bound to the Column?" With the unerring instinct of genius, Sodoma does not show us the flagellation, but its effects. When we see in thousands of other pictures the thongs whistling through the air and tearing the quivering flesh, it makes no such impression. Perchance when the brutal scene is over Christ will resume his calm. If Sodoma shows us the Man of Sorrows when body and mind are alike broken by pain; and the bruised and bleeding Christ who leans exhausted against that column is the most pitiful thing in all the range of art. The only thing that approaches it is Le Brun's fearful drawing of the Duchess of Brinvilliers after the torture; and there our pity is checked by the consciousness of her unspeakable crimes.

Mr. Berenson admits that Solario's "Madonna of the Green Cushion" has still a charm for him, but he treats this as a survival of the weakness of his youth. But Solario painted many pictures of almost equal loveliness, and his landscape backgrounds alone should save him from condemnation; just as the enchanting glimpse of mountain and river seen through the window of Ferrari's "St. Paul," in the Louvre, should alone suffice for his fame. And as for Boltraffio, that wonderful head of a youth in the Uffizi, where the sweet melancholy of Antinoüs is revived in a face still more beautiful, should shield him from too harsh a censure.

In fact, Mr. Berenson's artistic standards are too severe. Only the qualities that he calls "life enhancing," the qualities of vigorous presentation which make a picture seem more real than nature, appeal to him. He does not sufficiently appreciate sweetness and grace, delicacy and charm. He even despises emotion and the too evident expression of the feelings. The elements that he seeks are worthy of all honor—they are perhaps the highest that a work of art can possess. But they are not the whole; and the qualities which he despises are those which most effectively perform one of art's highest functions—consolation. As Schopenhauer long since discovered, art is the great consoler. In its presence we forget our griefs, our disappointments, the weariness of life. It bears us away into the realm of the imagination, and causes us to forget the sordid or

bitter realities that make a burden of existence; and there is many a picture that would not measure up to Mr. Berenson's severe standards, which yet admirably performs this function.

GEORGE B. ROSE.

THE 1907 BAMPTON LECTURES

THE REPROACH OF THE GOSPEL. Being the 1907 *Bampton Lectures*. By J. H. F. Peile. New York: Longmans, Green & Company. 1907.

Mr. Peile's Bampton Lectures, or Bampton *Sermons* as they should be called, are quite remarkable. Not because they give evidence of profound learning, since as a matter of fact almost every noticeable statement in the book is enclosed in quotation marks, but because they are honest and earnest discourses upon the much neglected fundamentals of life. Perhaps the best key to the author's purpose is on page 192, where he says:

"It was my deliberate purpose to raise more questions than I can answer, in the hope of getting some of them answered by wiser and better people than myself. . . . I desire to make people . . . discontented . . . and I shall have succeeded so far, if my words help . . . in bringing the fine intellect and character of Oxford to the solution of the riddles which perplex and threaten us."

We all feel that these lectures would be of great value if they awaken some prophet to tell us in the next series how the "Reproach of the Gospel" is to be wiped away.

Specifically, the first two lectures are weak; they confuse one by attempting too much and leaving much unsaid. The third lecture is not convincing, and the fourth is barely suggestive. But when we come to the last four we enter more fertile fields and discover at last the writer's ability. In the fourth lecture, on "Social Questions," we find many things well said; and obtain generally an healthy and vigorous view of the modern sociological situation. We are worried by no rhetorical panaceas, nor does the writer confuse us by Utopian platitudes. He simply gives us a clear diagnosis of the whole disease politic, brushing aside symptoms and directing our attention to the real root of the trouble. Which metaphor reminds us of a similar one used